

species disjunct from the mountains and found only in this site in Orange County; over 500 individuals of this species were counted in 1987 and similar numbers existed in 2001. Growing amid the cohosh are other species more typical of the mountains than of the eastern Piedmont, including thick growths of maidenhair ferns (*Adiantum pedatum*) and scatterings of ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*), a species considered of special concern within the entire state. Other spring wildflowers adding to the luxuriance of this slope are foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia* var. *collina*), windflower (*Thalictrum thalictroides*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), hepatica (*Hepatica americana*), and toothwort (*Cardamine angrustata*). One other noteworthy species included in this natural area, although growing in a drainage ditch located across the creek from the other montane plants, is the purple fringeless orchid (*Platanthera peramoena*), a species listed as state rare-peripheral within North Carolina.

In addition to indirectly contributing to the rich plant life of this natural area, the stream flowing through this site provides a diversity of habitats for animals, including extensive areas of riffles as well as sandy-bottomed pools. Despite some degree of siltation due to runoff from fields upstream, this portion of Sevenmile Creek still harbors healthy populations of darters, shiners, pickerels, and other species of fish, along with abundant mussels. Included in this fauna is the notched rainbow (*Villosa constricta*), a state rare mussel, which has been found at only four other sites within the county. Reflecting the good fishing in the creek is the presence of river otter (*Lutra canadensis*), a regionally rare species. Resident great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*) and red-shouldered hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) similarly reflect the good condition of the bottomland forest.

Altogether, the aesthetic quality of the site is excellent; many of the trees exceed two feet in diameter, indicating a long history without disturbance. The fact that it adjoins the protected lands of the historic Moorefields estate further adds to its attractiveness as one of the best of the county's natural areas.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The county-owned portion is managed for permanent protection as part of the Seven Mile Creek Preserve; the adjoining Moorefields historic site is managed as a wildlife preserve. The site should be preserved as county owned natural area in conjunction with adjacent Moorefields historic site.

OWNERSHIP: Orange County, Private

REFERENCES:

Mansberg, L. 1986. Site Survey Report: Sevenmile Creek. N.C. Natural Heritage Program, DENR, Raleigh, NC.

Sather, D. and S. Hall. 1988. Inventory of the Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats of Orange County, North Carolina, Appendix B: Biological Documentation of Sites. N.C. Natural Heritage Program, DENR, Raleigh, NC.